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Edited by
Pamela Karantonis and Dylan Robinson

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In Memory of Catherine Parsons Smith

Chapter 1

Orpheus Conquistador

Nicholas Till

In his discussion of Verdi's *Aida* in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said writes that "*Aida*, like the opera form itself, is a hybrid, radically impure work that belongs equally to the history of culture and the historical experience of overseas domination."[1] This sentence may only mean that opera is like *Aida* in being "hybrid and radically impure." But it could also mean that opera itself is convicted in its very form of being complicit with the project of European imperialism—a breathtaking assertion.

Said says nothing more about this to substantiate his claim. But he does suggest that Verdi's obsession, at the time he was writing *Aida*, with "unified" works, "in which," to quote Verdi, "the idea is ONE, and everything must converge to form this one," and Verdi's dismissal of the idea that singers or conductors might make a creative contribution to the work of opera since there must be "only one creator" should be seen as an assertion of an "imperial notion" of the artist.[2]

Is this use of the term "imperial" really anything more than a metaphor? Certainly for Said, whose main concern as a critic was with the European novel, there is a kind of narrative and epistemological confidence in the novel that he believes is only made possible by an imperialistic attitude to the world.[3] Said also argued that the cavalier treatment of space in the eighteenth-century English novel conveys a consciousness informed by colonial expansion.[4] Musicologists have suggested that the tonal system, developed around 1600, should be identified as a quasi-spatial expansion of the language of music in the same vein, an argument first put forward by Edward Lowinsky, who claimed as long ago as 1941 that "it was the same spirit of adventure, the same desire to open new and unexplored spaces, that lured the sailors across the sea and beckoned the musicians to their discoveries of remote

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I am extremely grateful to Tim Carter for looking this chapter over for me, and for his invaluable observations, queries and suggestions.

1 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 137.

2 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 140. The Verdi quotes are from Hans Busch, *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 4–5.

3 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 95.

4 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 83.

and distant keys and new harmonic conquests."[5] This analogy of exploration and discovery is now commonplace in accounts of the beginnings of modern music in the hands of Monteverdi and his contemporaries.[6] Recently Timothy Taylor has suggested that such musical developments should also be been seen in relation to the impact that colonialism had upon European notions of selfhood and otherness, arguing that tonality "arose to a long supremacy in western European music in part because it facilitated a concept of spatialization in music that provided for centers and margins, both geographically and psychologically."[7] Both Taylor and Eric Chafe suggest that there was also a close relationship between the development of tonality and the rise of opera as an art form that responded to the "newly awaked desire to extend the human hegemony into hitherto unexplored regions"[8] (although we might wish to rephrase that in less universalizing terms).

In these accounts the precise nature of the relationship between opera and tonality is far from clear, and the association of exploration and colonization with expanded musical spatialities remains largely figurative. This chapter is part of a larger project in which I hope to show that the emergence of opera as an art form around 1600 must indeed be understood as an essential component of the intellectual and cultural project of early modernity, of which colonialism was one of the most distinctive elements. Said went so far as to describe imperialism as "the determining political horizon of modern western culture"[9] and there has been a suggestion by historians of the early modern period that that period should be rebranded as "Early Colonial" to highlight the centrality of colonialism to its outlook.[10] In this chapter I will attempt to make the relationship between early opera and colonialism clearer through an analysis of a little commented-upon passage from Alessandro Striggio's text for Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of 1607.

Along with the European encounter with, and domination of, the Americas, the development of observational and experimental methods in science, which we now call the scientific revolution, is also identified as a crucial aspect of early modernity. In a scene at the end of Act III of *Orfeo* these two axes of early modernity—navigational and scientific exploration—are quite clearly referred to in

5 Edward Lowinsky, "The Concept of Physical and Musical Space in the Renaissance," *Papers of the American Musicological Society*, ed. Gustave Reese (Minnesota: Minneapolis University Press, 1941), pp. 57–84, p. 81.

6 Thus Eric T. Chafe refers to "the qualities of exploration and discovery in Monteverdi's music," Eric T. Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* (New York: Schirmer, 1992), p. 2.

7 Timothy Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 25.

8 Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*, p. 2.

9 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 70.

10 Margaret de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (eds.), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Introduction pp. 1–13; p. 5.

words sung by a chorus of Infernal Spirits (*Spiriti Infernale*). Orpheus, attempting to cross the river Styx to penetrate into the underworld to rescue Eurydice, has failed to persuade Charon, the ferryman of the dead, to transport him across the river. Instead he lulls Charon to sleep and seizes Charon's barque to ferry himself across the river, thrice repeating the ardent plea "rendetemi 'l mio ben" ("restore my love to me") as he does so, each phrase rising in pitch and passion. It is a striking moment: the musical and dramatic climax of the whole opera, and Orpheus's daring elicits from the Infernal Spirits the following encomium:

> No enterprise is undertaken by man in vain,
> Against him nature can no longer protect herself,
> And on the unsettled plain
> He ploughed the rolling fields, and scattered seed
> With his own efforts reaping golden harvests.
> Hence that the memory of his glory might live on,
> Fame loosed her tongue to sing
> Of he who harnessed the ocean with fragile ships
> Defying the fury of the south wind and of the north.[11]

Those last four lines should be heard as accompanying the visual image of Orpheus navigating the perilous river.

Tim Carter notes that this chorus "has usually been interpreted as a conventional Humanist statement of the power of man,"[12] a latter-day example of the Renaissance encomium[13] in praise of the dignity of man such as those by the fifteenth-century Florentine humanists Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola. A belated example of the genre can be found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, written only a few years before *Orfeo*:

> What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals.[14]

But the Italian historian Lauro Martines suggests that during the sixteenth century the theme of the dignity of man went out of fashion in Italy as the political and social temper of the period darkened during the course of the century after the invasion of Italy by the French in 1494, the Sack of Rome by Habsburg troops in 1527, and the subsequent social and political turmoil of the Reformation and

11 Alessandro Striggio, "La Favola d'Orfeo", Mantova, 1607. Reprinted in Barbara Russano Hanning, *Of Poetry and Music's Power: Humanism and the Creation of Opera* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), Appendix E, p. 318.

12 Tim Carter, *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 2002), p. 113.

13 Encomium: a rhetorical term meaning the praise of a person or thing.

14 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II, 2, 303–312.

Counter-Reformation.[15] Hamlet's words are, of course, ironic, and the references in the chorus from *Orfeo* are in fact much more specific. The verse cited above is the first of three, of which Monteverdi only set one. Carter suggests that the reference in the first verse is to the voyages of Jason and the Argonauts. This is plausible not only because Orpheus was, by some accounts, one of the Argonauts himself, but also since in the following verse the heroism of Orpheus is explicitly compared to that of Daedalus, the great scientist of Greek mythology, who invented the means of human flight. In the final verse there is an unmistakable reference to Phaeton, who carjacked the chariot of his father Apollo and drove it through the heavens. Carter notes that the verses describe the conquest of each of the elements: Water, Air, Fire and Earth (Orpheus himself), but that as an encomium it is tinged with foreboding since Daedelus's son Icarus fell to his death when he ignored his father's warnings and flew too near the sun, and Phaeton expired when he lost control of the chariot of the sun itself. Citing also the bloody denouement of Jason's relationship with the barbarian princess Medea, Carter sees all three stories as portents of the hubris that will shortly reverse the fortunes of Orpheus too.[16]

If this were the case it would be uncharacteristic of the era in which Monteverdi and Striggio wrote *Orfeo*. The seafaring feats of Jason and the technological inventions of Daedalus were often referred to in literature and imagery of the period. However, I have found only one example of these feats being described as hubristic, in the verse epic *L'Adone* of 1623 by Giambattisto Marino, many of whose poems were set by Monteverdi. In his invocation to the tenth canto of the poem, Marino compares the poetic challenge has he set himself to the dangerous feats of Typhis (the steersman of the Argonauts), Orpheus, Daedalus, and Prometheus

> Typhis first raised sails above the ways,
> Orpheus with his lyre went down to hell,
> Daedelus plied wings through upper air,
> Prometheus to the sphere of fire took flight.
> 'Tis meet that pain should follow recklessness
> Through rash and foolish ventures such as these.[17]

But later in the same canto, in a section that serves as a lengthy encomium to Galileo, Mercury predicts the prowess of Columbus:

[15] Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 299.

[16] Carter, *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*, p. 114.

[17] Giambattista Marino, *Marino* Adonis: *Selections from the l'Adone of Giambattista Marino*, ed. and trans. Harold Martin Priest (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1967), Canto X, stanza 3, pp. 182-3.

> Cleaving the breast of the ocean, vast and deep,
> But not without grave peril and bitter strife,
> Liguria's Argonaut down on earth
> Will yet discover a new land and sky.

Following which Galileo is described as "a second Typhis, not of sea but of heaven," whose discoveries are even more praiseworthy because they are "without risk"—a comment not without irony given Galileo's fate at the hands of the Inquisition ten years later.[18]

Marino's condemnation of Orpheus and his peers may be no more than a rhetorical flourish, but even if we take it seriously it is nonetheless relative, since Marino's dismissal of classical overreachers serves to offset his later praise for Columbus and Galileo, in which Galileo takes the ultimate crown since his achievements are intellectual and "heavenly" (a distinction that is also, perhaps, present in *Orfeo*, in which, as we shall see, Orpheus conquers Hades but fails to conquer his own affections, a sign of his inability to rise above worldly concerns to more elevated spiritual heights). Marino would seem to be contrasting the failure of the classical adventurers, whose exploits are deemed premature, with the successful ventures of the modern era. Perhaps Marino's ultimate accolade for Galileo is because, at a time when Italy had ceded seafaring prowess to the new colonial powers of Portugal, Spain, England, France, and Holland, Marino is keen to shift attention from geographical to scientific exploration, in which, with Galileo in the ascendant, Italy could claim a new pre-eminence.

It is true that in classical literature the fate of Jason was often adduced as a warning against voyaging into forbidden realms, as in Seneca's play *Medea*, in which the chorus admonishes Jason for his foolhardiness. The injunction against voyaging in foreign parts was also associated with venturing beyond the Pillars of Hercules, upon which Hercules was supposed to have placed the command *ne plus ultra* ("no further," or "nothing beyond"). The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg has shown that in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance the story of Daedalus and Icarus served similarly as an illustration of St. Paul's warning against the sin of intellectual curiosity.[19] But by the seventeenth century it was far more common for the negative connotations of these stories to have been reversed. In 1516, the year that he became King of Spain, Charles V adopted a new motto: it showed the Pillars of Hercules emblazoned with the words "Plus Oltre" ("Yet Further/More Beyond"), a motto that came to be seen as a reference to the Atlantic voyaging to the New World beyond the Pillars of Hercules in which the Spanish kingdom was already so invested.[20] By the mid-sixteenth century Jason's intrepid steersman

[18] Marino, *Marino* Adonis, Canto X, stanza 45, p. 191.

[19] Carlo Ginzburg, "High and Low: The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Past and Present*, 73 (1976), pp. 28–42.

[20] Earl Rosenthal, "Plus Ultra, Non Plus Ultra and the Columnar Device of Emperor Charles V," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 34, (1971), pp. 204–228.

Typhis was often represented as patron of the new breed of exploratory mariners,[21] and Ruben's 1635 designs for The Arch of the Mint in Antwerp show Jason himself as a victorious conquistador standing triumphantly atop Mount Potosi, the richest silver mine in South America.[22]

Similarly, by the sixteenth century the characterization of Icarus as a rash overreacher had often been modified. In one of his allegorical readings of the Greek myths, published as *De sapientia veterum* (*The Wisdom of the Ancients*) in 1609, Francis Bacon suggested that Icarus had chosen the better path if the choice was between ambition or caution (described by Bacon as "defect"), despite his eventual fate:

> And no wonder that excess should prove the bane of Icarus, exulting in juvenile strength and vigour; for excess is the natural vice of youth, as defect is that of old age; and if a man must perish by either, Icarus chose the better of the two; for all defects are justly esteemed more depraved than excesses.[23]

Ginzburg shows that by the seventeenth century the myth of Icarus was regularly being represented in this kind of positive light. In 1635 The Italian Jesuit Daniello Bartoli even compared Icarus to Columbus, concluding "without his boldness, we would have neither American spices, nor American mines," and Ginzburg points to popular emblem books that similarly represented Icarus as a symbol of intellectual courage, one such image carrying the Virgilian motto "Nil linquere inausum" ("leave nothing untried"). As Ginzburg puts it, "the very notions of 'risk' and 'novelty' were now seen as positive values—appropriate, in fact, to a society increasingly based on commerce."[24]

What all of these examples suggest is that when *Orfeo* was written there was a widespread cultural excitement about the still expanding worlds of navigational and scientific discovery, which were almost always seen in a positive light. In Striggio's text for Monteverdi we are presented with an analogy between these two spheres of action, an analogy that was articulated most consistently by Francis Bacon, today recognized as the chief ideologue of the scientific revolution. In *The Advancement of Learning* of 1605 Bacon suggested that "proficience in

Rosenthal demonstrates that the origins of the Latin form of the "Ne/Non Plus Ultra" motto are very uncertain, although it is cited in Italian by Dante.

[21] John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 171.

[22] Elizabeth McGrath, "Rubens's Arch of the Mint," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 37 (1974), pp. 191–217.

[23] Bacon, "De sapienta veterum," translated as "On the Wisdom of the Ancients," in James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (eds), *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996; reprint of 1879 edition), Vol. VI, Part II, pp. 754-5.

[24] Ginzburg, "High and Low," p. 38.

navigation and discoveries may plant also an expectation of further proficience and augmentation of all sciences, because it may seem that they are ordained by God to be coevals, that is, to meet in one age."[25] In *The New Atlantis*, Bacon's vision of a utopian community based upon scientific principles, the first and only named founding father of the state is Columbus.[26] On the title page of what was to have been Bacon's crowning achievement, the incomplete *Instauratio Magna* (1620), Bacon appropriates Charles V's famous emblem to show an image of two proud galleons setting sail across the Atlantic beyond the Pillars of Hercules.

In equating science and exploration Bacon insisted that the aim of science was to dominate nature so that nature could be made to work for the benefit of humankind, in the same way that the conquistador dominated and exploited the new found lands of America. For Bacon knowledge was power, and his metaphors were invariably couched in terms of both patriarchal and colonial domination. In *The Masculine Birth of Time* Bacon writes "I am come in very truth leading you to Nature with all her children, to bind her to your service and make her your slave."[27] The representation of America as a supine female nude in Jan van der Straet's famous image of Vespucci's discovery of continental America might serve equally as an illustration of Bacon's Nature, particularly since we note that Vespucci carries not only the cross of faith, but also, prominently, the scientific instruments of navigation that have made his expedition possible (see Figure 1.1).[28]

But Bacon's equation of colonial and scientific exploration was already a commonplace of thought in the sixteenth century. Just as Bacon and Galileo challenged the Aristotelian natural philosophers' reliance upon textual authority over observation and experiment, for many advocates of the scientific pursuit of truth it was the discovery of the New World that had been the first empirical refutation of the Aristotelian system, confounding the classical and Christian conviction that there could be no inhabited lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Thus in 1549 Jacques Cartier, the French mariner credited with the discovery of that part of the North American continent now known as Canada, declared that "the common navigators of our day, making experiments, have learned the opposite of

[25] James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (eds), *The Works of Francis Bacon* (London: Routledge / Thoemmes Press, 1996) (reprint of 1879 edition), Vol. III, Part I, p. 340.

[26] Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. III, Part I, p. 165.

[27] Bacon, "Temporis Partus Masculus," translated as "The Masculine Birth of Time," in Benjamin Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon: An Essay on its Development from 1603–1609, with new translations of fundamental texts* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1964), p. 62.

[28] In the background a second group of women are dismembering and roasting some human victims. We cannot but remember Orpheus's fate at the hands of the female Maenads in most versions of the myth: similarly dismembered, even if Striggio and Monteverdi had the good taste (or good sense) not to try to represent this event in the version of their opera that was actually performed.

Figure 1.1 Amerigo Vespucci discovers America, Theodore Galle (after Jan van der Straet), *Nova Reperta*, Antwerp, c.1588–1612

the opinions of the philosophers."[29] Many thinkers, including the political theorist Jean Bodin, suggested that technological inventions such as the printing press were innovations that could be compared to geographical discovery, and as early as 1532 the geographer Apianus wrote that, without inventions such as printing and instruments of navigation "life would return to the state of the ancient men who lived without laws of civilization, similar to beasts." Those "ancient men" had, of course, been found living when Columbus reached the Americas.[30]

Columbus originated from Genoa. As noted above, although Italian mariners were great navigators, the Italian states themselves were not involved in the discovery or colonization of the New World. But between 1581 and 1596 there were no fewer than three epic poems on the voyages of Columbus published in Italy. At a time of marked economic and political decline in Italy, Columbus was, it seems, being vigorously promoted as an Italian hero in an act of retrospective

29 Paolo Rossi, *Philosophy, Technology and the Arts in the Early Modern Era* (New York, Evanston, IL, and London: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 66.

30 For Bodin and Apianus, see Rossi, *Philosophy*, p. 71.

mythologizing.[31] And, in 1608, Parigi's spectacular stage sets for the Florentine intermezzo *La notte d'amore*, presented to celebrate the wedding of Prince Cosimo de' Medici, depicted the ship of another Italian seafarer Amerigo Vespucci, reminding those present that the continents of America had been named after a Florentine, an employee of Lorenzo de' Medici, the Magnificent.

Tommaso Campanella, best known as the author of the Christian utopia *Città del sole*, writing during his imprisonment for heresy between 1600 and 1626, compared Columbus's feats directly with those of the heroes of Greek mythology and, like Cartier, declared that Columbus "saw more with his eyes and experienced more with his body than did with their minds the poets, philosophers, and the theologians Augustine and Lactantius, who denied the Antipodes."[32] For Campanella too, inventions such as printing, the compass, and now Galileo's telescope, served as signs of man's new mastery over nature, which Campanella describes in language that is very close to Striggio's verses in *Orfeo*:

> A Second God, miracle of the First,
> He commands the depths; without wings he mounts to the heavens
> And counts its motions, measures and qualities…
> He masters the wind and wave; in full-sailed ships he circles the earthly globe,
> He beholds and conquers all, trades and plunders.[33]

I have cited these examples so extensively to demonstrate how ubiquitous were the rhetorical tropes linking science and discovery in the era of *Orfeo*, and also to demonstrate that the modern heroes of discovery and science were regularly exemplified by their mythological forbears. Scholars of early opera such as Robert Donington and Gary Tomlinson have made much of the neo-platonic allegorizing of the Orpheus myth that was prevalent in Italian Renaissance culture.[34] But in their desire to embed the opera in the intellectual climate of its era, in Tomlinson's case suggesting that Monteverdi must be understood in relation to Foucault's pre-modern episteme of magic and resemblance, they have overlooked the fact that the early seventeenth century is a very different world from that of the earlier Renaissance humanists and neo-platonists. Foucault himself was curiously uninterested in the influence of scientific thought upon what he call the "classical" episteme, and, like Tomlinson, is inclined to extend the Renaissance episteme right through until the end of the sixteenth century, ignoring the impact of the technologies recognized

31 Leicester Bradner, "Columbus in Sixteenth-Century Poetry," in *Essays Honoring Lawrence C. Worth* (Portland, ME: Anthoensen Press, 1951), pp. 15–30.

32 Tommaso Campanella, *Poesie: a cura di Giovanni Gentile* (Bari: Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, 1915), p. 86.

33 Campanella, *Poesie*, pp. 170–71.

34 Robert Donington, *The Rise of Opera* (London: Faber, 1981); Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

long before by scholars such as Apianus, or the new cosmography of Copernicus. For Hegel, typically idealist (and, of course, German), the decisive historical moment of modernity was the Lutheran Reformation, also ignored by Foucault. But it could perhaps be argued that Foucault's most significant oversight was to have failed to recognize the impact of colonialism upon European intellectual culture in the sixteenth century. In Tzvetan Todorov's searching account of the conquest of Mexico by Hernando Cortés between 1519 and 1521, Todorov suggests that Cortés's astonishing victory was as much due to his superior epistemology as to his weapons, horses, or disease. In effect, the Mexicans had no cognitive means of dealing with the intruders since theirs was a truly pre-modern episteme based upon a cyclical, ritualized understanding of the world, whilst Cortés showed himself to be not only a supreme interpreter and manipulator of signs, but an empirical pragmatist willing to adapt his strategies according to the situation rather than according to pre-ordained expectations. In this he is in clear contrast to Columbus, whose encounters with the New World were always over-determined by his essentially medieval expectations.[35] If Columbus came to stand as a synecdoche for modernity to his contemporaries, it is the praxis of conquest represented by Cortés rather than the epistemology of encounter that now seems to mark the modern worldview more decisively. In support of my argument for placing *Orfeo* firmly within the early modern episteme I will offer another reading of the Orpheus myth by Francis Bacon from *De sapientia veterum*, which is known to have been written in the same year as *Orfeo*. In an essay entitled "Orpheus; or Philosophy," Bacon presents Orpheus's descent into the underworld as an allegory of the scientist's attempts to master the secrets of nature, arguing that Orpheus "seems meant for a representation of universal philosophy." Bacon then divides philosophy into two categories—natural and civil:

> The singing of Orpheus is of two kinds; one to propitiate the infernal powers, the other to draw the wild beasts and the woods. The former may be best understood as referring to natural philosophy; the latter to philosophy moral and civil. For natural philosophy proposes to itself; as its noblest work of all, nothing less than the restitution and renovation of things corruptible.[36]

For Bacon, listing in his appendix to *The New Atlantis* the thirty ends to which science could be put, the first and foremost was "the prolongation of life,"[37] which, as "restitution and renovation," is clearly the object of Orpheus's quest to restore Eurydice to life. One question that none of the commentators on *Orfeo* raise is: why did Striggio put the words of his encomium to modern man into the mouths

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35 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

36 Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. VI, Part II, pp. 720-22.

37 Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 167.

of the Infernal Spirits? We might, of course, interpret the words as a dispassionate, authorial proclamation of a universal truth, which had to be put into the mouths of someone. But the Infernal Spirits surely speak as the representatives of that vanquished nature that can no longer arm itself against humankind, the forces of death which Bacon's Orphic natural philosopher seeks to conquer, declaring their own defeat with Orpheus's decisive action of seizing Charon's barque.

So why, if he is apparently so invincible, does Orpheus eventually fail in his mission to rescue Euridice? For Striggio and Monteverdi, in words assigned to a *Choro di Spiriti*, who may or may not be the same as the Infernal Spirits, Orpheus fails because he allows his passions to get the better of him:

> Orpheus defeated Hades, and then was defeated
> By his own affections.
> Worthy of eternal glory
> Is only he who over himself has victory.[38]

Bacon often suggested similar obstacles to successful scientific enquiry: "The government of reason is assailed and disordered … by violence of passions."[39] But in his reading of the Orpheus story Bacon gives a slightly different explanation for the failure of natural philosophy: "And yet being a thing of all others the most difficult, it commonly fails of effect; and fails (it may be) from no cause more than from curious and premature meddling and impatience,"[40] a condemnation of those who abandon the path of painstaking experiment.

After his failure to rescue Eurydice, Bacon's Orpheus turns to "civil philosophy." And where Striggio makes the equation of science and exploration by analogy, in Bacon's reading of the Orpheus myth the relationship to colonialism is much more explicit, suggesting that Orpheus's ability to tame the beasts, woods, and mountains is an allegory of the effects of law and civilization upon primitive peoples.

> Civil philosophy teaches the peoples to assemble and unite and take upon them the yoke of laws and submit to authority, and forget their ungoverned appetites, in listening and conforming to precepts and discipline; whereupon soon follows the building of houses, the founding of cities, the planting of fields and gardens with trees; insomuch that the stones and the woods are not unfitly said to leave their places and come about her.[41]

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38 Claudio Monterverdi *L'Orfeo—Favola in Musica; Lamento D'Ariana, Tomo di Monteverdi—XI. XII. Opere*, ed. G. Franscesco Malipiero (Bologna: Ventura, 1930), pp. 107–112.

39 Bacon, "De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum," translation in Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. IV, p. 455.

40 Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. VI, Part II, p. 714.

41 Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. VI, Part II, pp. 720-22.

Bacon's description of the civilizing powers of Orpheus employs precisely the kind of argument that was used by Europeans to justify the appropriation of uncultivated land in the Americas and rule over indigenous American inhabitants. Although many Europeans were at first impressed by the apparently civilized behavior of the native inhabitants that they encountered in the new world, the imperative of domination meant that inevitably native Americans had to be recast as barbarians or savages. As one sixteenth-century European reported, the natives of America "lived like wild beasts without religion nor government, nor town, nor houses, without cultivating the land, nor clothing their bodies," quite clearly serving as ideal subjects for the civilizing effects of Orphic philosophy.[42] And although in several places Bacon himself argued against colonial empire-building in favor of extending the bounds of intellectual "human empire,"[43] as a politician Bacon fully supported the English and Scottish colonization of Ireland. The Irish were often compared to American Indians by Bacon's contemporaries, and in 1617 Bacon himself declared that British colonization had brought the Irish "from savage and barbarous customs to humanity and civility."[44]

Let us consider again the question of why Striggio's encomium is sung by the Infernal Spirits. Historical anthropologist Bernard McGrance argues in relation to the Europeans' earliest encounters with Native Americans that "within the Christian conception of Otherness anthropology did not exist; there was, rather, demonology."[45] De Certeau suggests that early travel literature in general serves as a "displacement of demonology" from Europe to the New World,[46] and Stephen Greenblatt has proposed that the increasing attribution of satanic worship and demonology to Native Americans during the later sixteenth century may have been influenced by Jean Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* of 1580.[47] The attribution of demonology became particularly prevalent when Europeans discovered how intransigent Native Americans could be about accepting the Christian religion, for which their only explanation was that the natives must be

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42 Cited in Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 132.

43 Bacon used this phrase in numerous of his writings, as for instance in *The New Atlantis*, Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 156.

44 Charles C. Whitney, "Merchants of Light: Science as Colonization in *The New Atlantis*," in William A. Sessions, *Francis Bacon's Legacy of Texts* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), p. 263.

45 Bernard McGrane, *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. ix.

46 Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 242, n. 52.

47 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonders of the New World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 15. See also Olivia Bloechl, "Protestant Imperialism and the Representation of Native American Song," *Musical Quarterly*, 87/1 (Spring 2004): pp. 44–86.

devil-worshipers. Thus John Smith, he of Pocahontas fame, wrote of the natives that he encountered that the chief god they worshiped was the devil, and that "they say that they have conference with him, and fashion themselves as near his shape as they can imagine."[48] In a rather Bosch-like painting of Hell by a Portuguese painter of c.1550 Satan is depicted as a fearsome Indian in feathered headdress and costume.[49]

Striggio's and Monteverdi's rather dignified Infernal Spirits are not, of course, the devils or demons of Christian mythology, although no Italian could ignore the resonances of Dante in the adjective "infernal." But the Infernal Spirits are, nonetheless, alien beings; quite clearly, we may say, "Other."[50] And, moreover, an Other that acknowledges its subjugation in this moment to the power of Orpheus Conquistador.

Francis Bacon's interpretation of the Orpheus myth in terms of scientific enquiry and colonial subjugation provides grounds for suggesting that the references to science and exploration in Striggio's chorus are more than incidental, particularly since they can also be shown to relate to some of Monteverdi's broader concerns as a musician. Bacon himself drew upon well-established traditions for his reading of Orpheus as the founder of civilization, going back to Plato, Pausanius, Fulgentius, and Horace. But Bacon draws even more strongly upon classical accounts of the power of rhetoric than upon traditions of mythical exegesis. The founding text for this tradition is Cicero's introduction to *De inventione*, in which a by now familiar story is told of how a man with "wisdom and eloquence" was able to make primitive peoples "gentle and civilized from having been savage and brutal."[51] Cicero's narrative, described by Eric Cheyfitz as "the scene of primal colonization of self and other,"[52] runs throughout the history not only of classical, medieval, and Renaissance rhetoric, but also of political theory and poetics, in which musicians with magical powers such as Arion, Amphion (who musicked the wall of Thebes into being), and Orpheus were regularly adduced as exemplars of the civilizing effects of rhetoric. We might also note that Cheyfitz's suggestion that "colonization of self" goes hand in hand with the colonization of the other accords with the moral that is drawn in *Orfeo* from the fact that Orpheus conquers Hades but fails to conquer himself; a moral that could equally apply to the early modern

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48 Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World: American Culture: The Formative Years* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 56.

49 *Inferno*, oil on panel, c.1550. Anonymous. Museu de Arte Antiga, Lisbon.

50 It has often been noted that the choruses of Greek tragedies usually represented marginalized groups—women, old men, foreigners—groups designated by Helen Foley as "Other": Helen Foley, "Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy," *Classical Philology*, 98/1 (January 2003): p. 5.

51 Cicero, *De inventione, De optimo genere oratorum, Topica*, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, and London: Heinemann, 1949), pp. 5–6.

52 Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 113.

bourgeois ethos of rationalism, prudence, and self-denial as to the more esoteric neo-platonic spirituality adduced by scholars such as Tomlinson.

Orphean music and rhetoric took on a particular color when associated with the ideology of colonialism. Writing about music and colonial encounters in the eighteenth century Vanessa Agnew suggests that the Orpheus myth is "a discourse of alterity, a story about music's privileged responsibility vis-a-vis otherness."[53] There is, in fact, some empirical evidence from the sixteenth century for this suggestion. Seafaring expeditions customarily carried musicians for military and ceremonial occasions, as well as "for ornament and delight" (as the purpose of the musicians who were hired in 1577 for Drake's circumnavigation of the globe was described[54]). Musicians were often used to signal friendly intent to native inhabitants when ships put ashore in alien territories, one of the best known instances being an encounter with natives on Columbus's Third Voyage, when we are told that "the Admiral, perceiving that he could nought prevail by signs and tokens, he determined with musical instruments to appease their wildness."[55] Another Italian, Sebastian Cabot, formalized the use of such methods in his 1551 instructions for the Merchant Adventurers on how to deal with natives, recommending the use of such musical instruments as "may allure them to hearkening, to fantasie, or desire to see, and heare your instruments and voyces, but keep you out of danger."[56]

Writing about music and colonialism in the seventeenth century, Olivia Bloechl draws attention to a passage in the Burwell lute tutor of around 1660 in which the conjunction of music and the encounter with native Americans is put into an explicitly Orphean context:

> Orpheus stopped the course of rivers with his playing, caused the trees to daunce tamed the wild beasts made them sociable and kind to one another there is nothing that brings more the wild nature of the Indians to a gentle constitution than musick and especially the lute.[57]

It was through these traditions of interpretation of the Orpheus story that the musical reformers associated with what Monteverdi described as the "Second Practice" found the essential link between the social and political value of rhetoric and a renewed cultural function for music. In my conclusion I can do no more than hint at the wider web of cultural discourses around music, language and power to which the colonial encounter with the New World gave rise. These discourses lie

53 Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 9.

54 Ian Woodfield, *English Musicians in the Age of Exploration* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995), p. 5.

55 Woodfield, *English Musicians*, p. 97.

56 Woodfield, *English Musicians*, p. 98.

57 Olivia Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.13.

behind the invention of opera itself, and its project to restore to music the powers that late Renaissance scholars found so clearly described in Plato and Aristotle, but which they considered to have been lost in their own day. For the progenitors of opera (Peri and Caccini both wrote operas based on the Orpheus myth before Monteverdi) the Orpheus narrative clearly carried rich connotations. And yet the story also delineates some of the anxieties to which these representations of the power of music gave rise. Historians of early colonialism such as Todorov and Greenblatt have pointed to the extended debates around the efficacy of language raised by the project of what Greenblatt describes as "linguistic colonialism."[58] These included discussion of the infamous *Requerimiento*, the proclamation which, from 1514, Spanish conquistadores were required to read aloud to any natives they encountered before appropriating their land. It informed them (in Spanish) that they had the choice of either voluntary acceptance of the rule of Christ and the kings of Spain, or being violently forced into submission. If the *Requerimiento* demonstrated that limitations of linguistic persuasion could in some circumstances be convenient, the opacity of language proved much more problematic in the vexed problem of converting Native Americans to Christianity—a far more challenging project than that of simply subjugating them.[59] As we have already noted, Orpheus fails to move the slow-witted Charon with his passionate rhetoric, like so many evangelizing Europeans coming up against the obduracy of Native Americans. Instead, dullard that he is, Charon simply falls asleep, leaving it to the aristocratic rulers of the underworld to succumb to the artistry of Orpheus's plea, whilst Orpheus himself grabs Charon's vessel in an act of conquistador-like force.

But what did it mean if music had such power to move (bewitch / enchant / seduce / intoxicate) people? When in 1557 the Genevan Jean de Léry encountered the singing of the Tupinamba Indians in Brazil he was perturbed by the fact that he could be so "transported" by a sound so alien, and could only justify his response by arguing that the natives must be possessed by Satan.[60] In time composers would come to represent their culture's anxiety about the power of music in operatic narratives which revolve obsessively around such bewitchment, enchantment, seduction, and intoxication. But even in its very inception opera recognizes that the power of Orpheus Conquistador carries an ambivalent historical burden.

58 Stephen Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century," in Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 22–51; Tzevetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

59 See Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, chapters 3 and 4.

60 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, pp. 14–17.